

(raising a total of \$5.1 billion) passed.

And while Californians had two chances to enact term limits for the state's elected officials, they rejected the initiative authorizing taxpayer-financed elections. Instead they chose a tougher measure that limited terms, cut legislators' hefty pensions, and slashed legislative staff budgets.

The tax revolt isn't dead, either. Nationwide, tax-limiting initiatives fared poorly. But incumbent governors in Nebraska, Kansas, and Florida lost largely because they approved unpopular tax increases. Bill Bradley nearly lost because he wouldn't defend his popular 1986 tax reforms or attack tax-hiking Gov. Jim Florio. Republicans pledged to slash spending in Massachusetts; not only did William Weld defeat John Silber, but the GOP fell only five seats short of a majority in the state legislature.

• *Nobody's found the "vision thing" yet.* The fair-haired Democrats don't have it. Voters realize that "tax the rich" eventually means "tax everybody."

The GOP is empty-handed as well. Republicans say they're different from Democrats. And some individual Republicans push their own initiatives—Jack Kemp's tenant ownership of public housing, Chris Cox's budget overhaul, John Porter's Social Security reform—but no one has articulated a sweeping plan to cut taxes, reduce spending, deregulate, and privatize. The bully pulpit is vacant.

The Democrats could step into this void before the 1992 presidential election. Al From of the moderate Democratic Leadership Council says that his party must "pick a candidate who is on the side of expanding opportunity and not the side of feeding government." Are you listening, Bill Bradley?

One universal bit of punditry is on target: People are disgusted with government in general. Only 36 percent of eligible voters went to the polls, a 50-year low. But if you plan to run in 1992 and interpret this dissatisfaction as a call for new government programs, here's some advice: Don't quit your day job. ■

possible soldiers and defend the country effectively. Furthermore, it involves government in a debate in which it has no business. As the first *Watkins* decision notes, "the Army believes that its ban against homosexuals simply codifies society's moral consensus that homosexuality is evil."

The Army also presents practical arguments, however. It maintains that the presence of gays in the ranks fosters tension, undermines morale and discipline, creates security risks, hurts the Army's public image, and impedes its recruitment efforts. If so, we must choose between a perpetually shaky national defense, leaving the whole country at risk, and occasional unfairness to individuals such as Watkins.

But this is a false dilemma. The Army can regulate actual sexual conduct without regard to preference, which the rules now target. The experience of Watkins and other openly gay soldiers shows that homosexuals can command respect and get along with both subordinates and superiors, precisely because a soldier's professional abilities have nothing to do with his or her sexuality. Far from harming the Army's ability to attract new soldiers, Watkins's sterling record would be fitting material for a recruitment commercial. Moreover, the Army's current policy actually increases the potential for security breaches by encouraging homosexual soldiers to keep their orientation secret, leaving them vulnerable to blackmail.

The Army's appeal to the prejudices of others to justify its own invidious discrimination has a familiar ring to it. A government history of World War II explains that, before it became the nation's leading example of successful racial integration, the Army "took the position that it was operating within a social framework which it did not create and which it did not have the power to alter in any significant manner." The top brass argued that "experiments within the Army in the solution of social problems are fraught with danger to efficiency, discipline and morale." In this environmentally conscious age, it's nice to know that even excuses can be recycled. ■

THE GAY BAR

JACOB SULLUM

The U.S. Army has long justified its exclusion of homosexuals as necessary to maintain military effectiveness. At the same time, however, it has implicitly acknowledged that this is a crock.

The case of former Sgt. Perry J. Watkins spotlights the Army's hypocrisy. In November, the Supreme Court let stand a 1989 decision by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit allowing Watkins, an avowed homosexual, to return to the Army. Watkins joined the service in 1967 and was open about his sexual preference throughout his 14-year career. The Army nevertheless promoted him, gave him "secret" security clearance, and allowed him to re-enlist three times.

By all accounts, Watkins was an excellent soldier; he received a perfect score on his most recent evaluation. His supe-

riors have testified that his homosexuality was well known and caused no problems. Yet in 1982 the Army refused to let him re-enlist, citing his sexual preference.

In *Watkins v. U.S. Army*, a three-judge panel of the Ninth Circuit Court initially found the Army's exclusion of gays unconstitutional on equal-protection grounds, but the full court later substituted a much narrower ruling. Even so, the case provides a compelling argument for the Army to reverse an unjust and irrational policy.

By retaining, praising, and rewarding soldiers such as Watkins, the Army tacitly admits that sexual orientation has no bearing on individual ability or performance. To exclude candidates on this basis therefore cheats taxpayers by impairing the Army's ability to field the best

"We are made wise not by the recollections of our past but by the responsibility for our future!"

—George Bernard Shaw

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LETTERS

The First Freedom

Charles Oliver has done a splendid job in unmasking the ideological pretensions of the ACLU ("The First Shall Be Last?," Oct.). All organizations are guilty of at least some inconsistencies, but what is most troublesome about the ACLU is its persistent use of state power to advance the goal of social equality against the rights of the individual. Restrictions on freedom of contract, rent control, affirmative action, busing, union shops, federally funded day care, comparable worth, etc., receive the support of the ACLU precisely because they service social equality, not civil liberties. Roger Baldwin, the founder of the ACLU, made clear the organization's mission, when in 1934 he declared, "civil liberties, like democracy, are useful only as tools for social change."

Regarding the ACLU's failure to defend anti-abortion protesters from prosecution under RICO statutes in Pennsylvania, it is not quite accurate to say that the ACLU refused to get involved. The Philadelphia affiliate filed an amicus brief on behalf of the plaintiff abortion clinic suing the protesters under the RICO statute. Furthermore, while the ACLU says it opposes using RICO statutes against those who practice civil disobedience, it is also true that in 1986 the ACLU released a booklet ("Preserving the Right to Choose") urging the affiliates to use RICO statutes against anti-abortion protesters.

In short, it is politics, not principle, that typically guides the thinking of the ACLU.

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CONGRATULATIONS TO Charles Oliver for revealing that, unfortunately, George Bush was right about the ACLU.

Bush, during the 1988 presidential campaign, accused the ACLU of having a liberal agenda. When asked to respond, those of us who worked for the organization at the time smiled for the cameras, shook our heads, and spewed forth the party-line answer: "Gee, the ACLU is neither conservative nor liberal; we're just an organization that works to protect constitutional rights." When I said those words, I knew I was lying.

Many of us in the "strict-constructionist" minority of the ACLU hoped that the Bush attacks would help drive the group back toward its original mission—protecting civil liberties—and steer it away from the liberal issues it increasingly embraced. Sadly, any change was fleeting at best.

"Workers' rights," economic entitlements, and silencing racists *are* left-wing goals and *are not* civil liberties issues. Many ACLU activists would respond—and I have heard this argument often—that "civil liberties are what the ACLU says they are." Following this logic, any issue can be a civil liberties issue. (No kidding, I've heard seemingly intelligent ACLUers argue that nuclear disarmament and cleaning up ground water pollution are civil liberties concerns.)

I have just renewed my membership despite the ACLU's recent history. I plan to continue working within the organization to try to return it to its original mission. Frankly, I fear it may be too late.

*Mark Lambert
Des Moines, IA*

Mr. Lambert is former legislative director of the Iowa Civil Liberties Union.—Eds.

CHARLES OLIVER FURTHER documents what should have long been clear to all observers: The ACLU travels under